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ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL LABOR PROBLEMS AND THE EUROPEAN FOOD PROBLEM

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WHEN I was asked to speak on labor conditions in Great Britain I asked the privilege also of putting before you at the same time the subject that is dearest to my heart—the feeding of Europe. At first sight, you may feel that the food conditions of Europe are rather far away from the subject of this conference, but if you stop for a moment, you will realize that food is the oil by which the whole of the great machinery of world industry swings smoothly on its pivot. As soon as you do not have food in sufficient quantity, or the cost is too high, you have strikes, unrest, industrial troubles, and you may even have worse conditions of anarchy and chaos, as in Europe and in Russia today—a situation that it seems impossible to find a speedy road out from.

Today food has still further value to all those interested in industry. We are today faced with the fact of great national war debts to pay off. At the same moment government contracts are coming to an end, and the great industrial world is faced with finding its markets again among the purchasing public and possibly with a reduced wage, which would mean that the purchasing power of that public will be lessened. This in turn means less demand for manufactured articles and that must create a period of unemployment and depression unless new outlets for your produce are at once created. Backed as you are today with this wonderful new merchant marine service, however, you can seek new foreign markets. Business men know that one of the most costly parts of any great business enterprise is the capturing and establishing of a new market. You have only to look at your magazines and bill boards to see the costs of advertising, and to get a glimmer of only one side of winning a new market. Today you have an opportunity

such as the world has never known of getting acquainted with foreign markets if you will help and feed Europe, placing the food at their door at a price they can pay or allowing liberal credit. There is the open door to your new markets, the opportunity to win them at the smallest possible cost. You know very well, if any of you have ever known what it is to be hungry, and somebody says "Come in and have dinner with me," and you go in and get a good dinner, you don't forget that person, and later on, when you may be more prosperous, and an opportunity comes how gladly you do that person a good turn. Europe is hungry today, Europe is starving, and if you will put your effort into the feeding of Europe you will find that your deed will not fail of its reward, and it will bring to you the foreign trade that you need for these great boats that you are building, and thus bring the work that the country will need to keep everybody employed at good wages. And there is a further value in this food situation to the industrial world. We have to face the demobilization of labor in certain sections, at any rate of labor in wartime work. Where can you find a better field for demobilization than in the development of the great agricultural wealth of this country? I have been amazed since I have come to this country to pass miles and miles of land on which only weeds and waste grass is growing, land which looks as if it had enormous possibilities, and yet you will not find even a cow or a sheep or a goat or a pig on thousands of acres of this land. Think of the difference it must make in the wealth of this country if more people were put in to develop the land. Here is, not only a field for your demobilized men, but a field for your women. Since I have been in this country, men say to me, "We can't have our women working in the fields." You look upon it in some parts of your country as if it were almost a disgrace and yet I do not consider it so. I go down and see your women in hot stuffy factories, sitting over a machine all day long; I go into your great offices, and even in some of the government offices, and in half an hour I am overpowered by the heat—I was in the Food Administration Office in Washington the other morning and I was so glad to get outside, I could hardly breathe—and you have women working there. Are these ideal conditions for women who are

going to be the mothers of the next generation? Cast your eye over the picture of women out in the fresh air. In your factories she often does some single movement of the hand or arm year in year out often with street or cabaret her only playground when the weary day's work is done, whereas out in the open she is doing a hundred odd jobs, feeding the cattle, tending to the various needs of the farm, helping with the crop, haying and harvest. Which of these women do you think is going to make the best mother, and the children of which mother do you think will have the best chance and start in life? Surely, if there ever was one employment in the world that gives a woman a chance for health and vigor it is work on the land.

I think the question of food touches the whole question of the industrial world. I had charge of the work of volunteer food supplies for the civilian population in the unconquered corner of Belgium for the first year and a half of the war. In the devastated districts—how I wish you could see it—the beautiful forests and trees have gone, the earth is torn up by these great shell-holes, many of them 30 or 60 feet deep. The fertile soil was the wealth of Belgium, and as you know, the fertile soil only goes to a depth of from one to four feet in Europe. Therefore, when you get down 30 or 40 feet, and throw up the rocks and sand from the bottom, you can understand it may be many long years before you can bring back the original fertility of that country. As you begin to pass through the villages, you may pass five or ten or fifteen villages, and not find a piece of wall standing. And, what of the people? Many of them of course fled to England and southern France, but not all, especially those who lived in the agricultural centers. Those little homesteads belonged to them, they had come down to them from father to son, and when the military authorities wanted to evacuate them they said, "No, we are not afraid of the Hun or of the shot and shell; let us stay by these little homesteads that we may have something left for the boy when he comes marching home." So, notwithstanding shot and shell they stayed, and when their little homes were knocked down they took pick and shovel and dug down 30 or 40 feet into the ground, and in those dark and unventilated dugouts many thousands of the civilian population in the devastated areas of

northern France and Belgium have been living for four weary years, waiting for America and the Allies to win them back their country. Passing on to the roads that lead from Germany back into the devastated areas, into France, Belgium, Serbia, and Poland and Roumania, the roads are lined with hundreds of thousands of women and children trooping back, half clothed, half naked, hungry, from slavery in Germany, but back where—home, and what is home? Just a little pile of brick, just a little torn-up patch, and they are going back to that to face the winter. You say, "What is France doing, what is England doing, in not opening hospitable arms to them?" Surely, there is all the hospitality in the world for them, but four years they have been away from home, and it is home they want, just home. They want to get at the work of rebuilding those walls, and tilling the soil. These are the people that are pleading today for food—cheap food, and turn your eyes from that picture, just one moment, to the picture of life right here in New York city, and ask yourselves is it right? No longer can we really talk of our being separate nations, Americans, Frenchmen, or Italians. The world has changed too much for that. This great aeroplane service that will bring London within 24 hours journey from New York city, and Rome within 48 hours for 30 to 50 passengers at a time, the great invention of wireless telegraphy, all these marvels, will bring us so close together that we cannot talk of "foreign" countries any more—we are neighboring allies, friends! Because there is a little patch of 3000 miles of water between us, does that make our responsibilities for their sufferings any less? Let us take a peep into Russia. In central and northern Russia the conditions are so appalling, and we can do so little, that right through this winter millions are going to die, and we cannot even save them. And after the declaration of peace Mr. Hoover will come with new problems that he will put before you for food distribution and production. I earnestly beg of you to throw your whole support back of your government, because in the feeding of Europe when peace is settled and the trade routes and shipping open again to the entire world is the one chance to bring order out of chaos, and to make the world happy and prosperous again.

Now, as to how England met the food shortage situation. In the early days of the war we waked up to realize that we were a tiny island, and our food supply was cut off. We only grew one quarter of what we consumed. We were not a crop-growing country, we were a stock-raising country, and our acreage is a little less than the acreage of the State of New York, and something had to be done. Ships were going to the bottom, loaded sometimes with millions of pounds of food. We immediately started to organize the women's labor. Then we had to face the proposition of the available housing facilities; for under the system of landlord and tenant farmer very little had been done for a great many years to put into effect anything like a decent housing proposition, and our people had lived in miserable little houses, and provision must be made for those who were going to be drafted in from the cities and homes of leisure. A plan was immediately evolved for providing for them in community camps. Camps were put about the country in any farming locality where labor was required, and then the girls went to live in these community centers. The farmer would send to the camp for labor, and each morning the army of girls would be distributed among the farms as needed. There was no cessation of labor, and the girls could be kept employed all the time, and the farmers could get the help that they needed when they needed it and not pay for it when they had no work. I think it has been largely that community spirit in our agricultural labor centers that made work on the farms so much more popular in England today than it was before the war. We had in the woman's land army in England some three hundred thousand women, besides a large number of women who lived in their own homes and gave part of their time to the work, and the result of the work of the women of Great Britain was to bring nearly a million and a half acres of land under cultivation that had never been under crop cultivation before, besides caring for the land already under production, and to raise the production from one-quarter of what we used to four-fifths of what we required for the coming year. The idea of co-operation has been the key to our success. The Government formed a big war agricultural committee in London, with war agricultural sub-committees in each county, and it was those little war agricul-

tural county committees that really brought about the success of the work. On these committees were put bankers and business men who are largely today land owners in the country districts, the leading farmers and the women, and into their hands the development of the agricultural interests of their own counties was placed. In some cases the county or town or district board was given supreme powers, and they could compel the people to bring their land under cultivation. So, by bringing all these different forces together—finance, business organization, farm experience and labor, we arrived at a great result, and I feel that over here in America, if more thought could be given to the development of increased food production of the country along similar lines by bringing together the farmers, the business men and the women more closely, the result would be absolutely amazing. Do you realize how enormously it would help your country through this difficult period of reconstruction if every state could bring a vast number of new acres under cultivation as were brought under cultivation during the war in the little island of England. How it would help to create new wealth, new fields of labor, and by easing the food situation, greatly minimize the difficulties in the European situation!

I leave this question with you today. It means more to the world perhaps than it is possible to estimate, and we must carry on. The boys gave their lives on the battlefields to this great cause. Let us build up a world that will be worthy of the blood that was shed. Let us make it our determination that we will carry on until the trail of death and destruction is wiped off the face of the earth, and the earth lives and rests once more in peace and happiness.